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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TEGUCIGALPA 002442

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA, WHA/PPC, WHA/USOAS, AND WHA/CEN
NSC FOR DAN FISK

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SUBJECT: HONDURAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION WEEKEND UPDATE:
LOBO AND NATIONALISTS BEAT A DEAD HORSE - NO CONCESSION YET

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 2438 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission James G. Williard;
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: While no official statements were made over the weekend declaring a President-elect, conversations did take place that initially led Post to believe that a concession by National Party presidential candidate Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo would be forthcoming later today, December 5. Furthermore, Liberal Party presidential candidate Manuel "Mel" Zelaya has quickly begun to form his cabinet of Ministers, which has raised eyebrows. Continued National Party objections over the weekend and a Lobo statement mid-day December 5 that rejected the need to concede has tempered Post's optimism that this drama will end soon. However, late breaking news that the two candidates plan to meet privately tonight, December 5, may indicate that the impasse will shortly end. End Summary.

Ambassador Meets with President Maduro

2. (C) On Saturday, December 3 former Honduran President Carlos Flores and National Party presidential candidate Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo phoned the Ambassador to let him know of Lobo's intentions to formally concede Monday, December 5. The fact that the call was made in tandem does add a level of credibility that it would otherwise not have assumed since Lobo made multiple, similar promises to the Ambassador on December 1. The substance of the Lobo-Ambassador conversation was subsequently shared in a conference call with State/WHA and NSC.

3. (C) The Ambassador had a lunch meeting with Honduran President Ricardo Maduro on Sunday, December 4. Maduro admitted that the election results shocked him. Maduro was clearly more focused on his post-GOH plans than the present. He mentioned that he is exploring the possibility of teaching at Georgetown University or University of Notre Dame and talked about continuing his work in Honduras by organizing current and former conservative leaders in the U.S., Latin America, and Europe to work on democracy in Central America. On an additional personal note, he mentioned that his marriage was in jeopardy and was likely heading toward a divorce soon.

4. (C) Maduro reflected on his administration and the future Zelaya Administration. He feels that Zelaya may be responsible on fiscal issues, but may also place blame with Maduro for the state of things at present. Maduro wants an IMF team to certify partial results at the end of his Administration. He also wants Congress to pass the draft telecommunications law and necessary CAFTA regulations. Maduro also shared that he thinks that Lobo is concerned about Mayor of Tegucigalpa Miguel Pastor fighting him for control of the National Party. Maduro is seeking recognition of the positive parts of his legacy and continues to be concerned about visa revocations for corrupt Administration officials. Ultimately, the lunch meeting was more about Maduro's own situation than the government or policies. President Maduro called the Ambassador the afternoon of December 5 sounding optimistic about a resolution to the ongoing electoral situation.

Vote Count Slows; National Party Alleges Irregularities

5. (U) PolOff confirmed that the Supreme Electoral Tribunal's (TSE's) vote count remains virtually unchanged from the afternoon of Friday, December 2. As of 10:00am on December 5, the Liberal Party has 49.90 percent of the vote, or 915,496 votes, and the National Party has 46.46 percent of the vote, or 846,886 votes, with 88.38 percent of the votes counted. Lobo leads in only four of the 18 Departments, including Francisco Morazan (Tegucigalpa). There are also 121,716 null ballots and 50,310 blank ballots, both out-polling the three small party candidates who only have 1-2 percent each.

6. (SBU) On the morning of December 5, PolChief spoke with Peter Barwick of the Organization of American States'

Electoral Observation Mission about the weekend discussions between the parties on the election. As discussed in reftel, the National Party was complaining about the relatively high percentage of null votes. The National Party was calling for a random review of these votes, although the Argentine election consultants maintain that there is no real correlation between null votes and a Zelaya lead. In fact, the consultant said that the election tables with the highest numbers of null votes tended to be won by the National Party. The National Party subsequently dropped the issue. (Note: Post and the OAS EOM believe that the relatively high percentage of null votes is due to a protest by voters against the presidential candidates. One Embassy OAS observer reported seeing a presidential ballot with the word "null" in Spanish written under each of the five candidates. End Note.)

17. (SBU) The National Party also has concerns over a supposed problem of excess ballots at certain election tables (as discussed in reftel). Although the Argentine election consultants again report that there is no pattern to the extra ballots, the National Party wants further investigation into the approximately 814 tables that had five or more excess ballots than the TSE said they should have. An even larger number, approximately 1,200 tables, had five or more less ballots than the TSE said they should have. Again, Post and the OAS EOM believe the likely explanation for these discrepancies are that the TSE sent too few or too many ballots to these electoral tables (as reported by Embassy OAS observers) than any other scenario, although some election table mathematical errors are likely as well. National Party leaders continue to claim there was a scheme by the Liberal Party to in effect stuff numerous ballot boxes with extra ballots brought by individual voters to affect each electoral table at the margins. The source of some of this information is supposedly a man jailed in San Pedro Sula on an unrelated issue who claims that extra presidential ballots were printed by a company in Guatemala that gave them to the Liberal Party for use.

18. (C) The National Party, through the TSE's Political Consultative Commission, requested that the TSE and the parties conduct a review at the TSE warehouse of electoral materials at 150 electoral tables selected by the Argentine experts (75 with too many ballots and 75 with too few ballots), particularly to look at the number of total ballots. According to the OAS, after considerable back and forth between the parties and the TSE, in which the Christian Democrats realigned with the National Party, the UD stood opposed, PINU was agnostic, and the Liberal Party flip-flopped, TSE President Aristedes Mejia said that such an idea was not contemplated in the electoral law and the discussion ended. PolOff was informed the morning of December 5 that the Minister of Defense in fact received a phone call December 3 informing him that the TSE warehouse might be attacked by political party supporters. Since the call, 20 additional special forces have been stationed there, though none report any suspicious activity. The extra forces will be released by mid-day December 5, though military will continue to monitor the warehouse until two to three days after a president-elect has been announced. PolOff confirmed that the TSE warehouse is now sorting through the remaining electoral materials, but that all existing vote counts have been pulled out and forwarded to the TSE tabulation center.

19. (C) Despite the closing window for initial legal challenges of events that took place on Election Day, the OAS EOM reports that National Party leader David Matamoros threatened a possible challenge of the elections to the Supreme Court (which the Nationals control 8-7 over the Liberals). The OAS EOM is scheduled to end December 6. PolChief made clear to the OAS that Post wanted the OAS to stay until there was a resolution of the outstanding presidential election. Matamoros told PolChief December 5 that with the failure to conduct the review of the 150 electoral tables the situation was roughly the same with no movement toward a Lobo concession, although he indicated Lobo and Zelaya may meet privately to discuss the situation.

Unofficial President-Elect Begins to Name His Cabinet

10. (C) PolChief spoke December 3 with Liberal Party presidential campaign manager and future Minister of Finance Hugo Noe Pino to confirm rumored cabinet appointments. Pino said the following nominations were official:

- Minister of the Foreign Affairs - Jorge Arturo Reina (Note: Zelaya informed the Ambassador late December 5 that Reina would not/not be named Foreign Minister - see para. 12. End Note.)
- Minister of Education - Rafael Pineda Ponce
- Minister of Agriculture - Hector Hernandez Amador
- Minister of Public Security - Alvaro Romero
- Minister of Health - Orisson Velasquez

Noe Pino said the next two were very likely:
- Central Bank President - Gabriela Nunez

- Minister of Commerce - Yani Rosenthal Hidalgo

11. (U) Others that have been named in the press as new ministers are:

- Minister of the Honduran Fund for Social Investment - Marlon Guillermo Lara
- Minister of Housing - Hector Briceno
- Minister of Public Works - Jose Roasio Bonano

(Note: Please see forthcoming septels with biographic information on probable new ministers. End Note.)

12. (SBU) The NGO Center for Investigation and Promotion of Human Rights (CIPRODEH) has denounced the appointment of Alvaro Romero saying that it is a clear "backsliding of demilitarization", given that he is a retired military general. During the Carlos Roberto Reina Administration, Romero instigated civil control of the police.

13 (C) At Washington's request, PolChief made it clear to Noe Pino December 3 that the Embassy and Washington had great concern about the appointment of Jorge Arturo Reina as the Minister of Foreign Affairs due to his background as a Communist with strong anti-U.S. views. Noe Pino said he understood why the USG would be concerned about Reina, but said that the USG should know that Zelaya intends to have a centrist, practical, non-ideological government (see septel for details). Ambassador reiterated the same points in a December 5 morning phone conversation with Zelaya, in which Ambassador emphasized that as someone currently ineligible for a visa, Reina could not even travel to the U.S. at present. Zelaya said he did not know that Reina was a problem. Ambassador emphasized that Zelaya should not bring Reina to the planned December 6 meeting with U/S Hughes and WHA A/S Shannon in San Pedro Sula on the margins of their visit to Honduras. Zelaya phoned the Ambassador late the afternoon of December 5 to say that Reina would not/not be the Foreign Minister. Zelaya also said that he would be meeting with Lobo tonight to discuss the ongoing electoral situation.

Lobo Holding Out; Zelaya/Lobo Meeting Scheduled

14. (C) Comment: The waiting game continues in an odd sort of manner; everyone knows who the next President of Honduras is, and everyone is starting to act that way; everyone, that is, except the candidate (and party) that lost. Lobo and his party faithful seem to be conducting a deliberate strategy to delay the inevitable, possibly while trying to negotiate with the Liberals on a variety of issues. Zelaya, however, did not sound like he had been playing that game directly, telling the Ambassador on December 5 that he had not spoken to Lobo in days. With Lobo stating publicly December 5 that he is not obligated to accept defeat, and the Liberals planning a possible protest march from Liberal Party headquarters to the Casa Presidencial for December 7 to protest the National Party's tactics and the TSE slowdown (unless either one show progress, according to Noe Pino's December 5 comments to PolChief), Post is no longer optimistic that this drama will end soon. Hopefully, the planned direct Zelaya-Lobo meeting the evening of December 5 can break the logjam. End Comment.

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